

Faith On Fire!

Catholic Charismatic
Renewal Center
Diocese of Erie



Reflections on 'The Greater Things'

"Amen, Amen, I say to you, whoever believes in me will do the works that I do, and will do greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." (John 14:12)

April 2022

Volume XXXVII Issue No. 04

JUNK FOOD—FOOD FOR THOUGHT By: Jaci Phillips, PhD

Thirteen years ago, as I was building and directing a Neuropsychology Division within a university hospital (*not much stress there... HA!*). For the first time in my life I was not taking the time to exercise. In addition, drug companies provided us with *amazing, rarely healthy, high calorie* lunches nearly every day. These always included some form of super-rich desert that only the strongest of strong could pass up. Well, this does have its consequences. For the first time in my life I had to lose some weight. I researched diets and started one I found to be medically sound and lost 50 pounds in less than 6 months. This diet was not about not eating. It was about eating foods that were good for me instead of high-sugar, low nutrient processed foods. I actually *ate more* on this diet than before I started it! But I was finally eating what my body needed.

What was the first thing to go? JUNK FOOD! Had I continued, it would have led to serious health problems, including probable diabetes, high cholesterol, and high blood pressure (metabolic syndrome). We just are not built to thrive on high amounts of sugars and simple carbohydrates. My greatest temptations were fizzy Coke from the fountain (yum) and potato chips, not even to mention other indulgences, such as the drive-thru. These things may taste great, but they make us sick and shorten our lifespan.

Our brains don't function well on them either. They make us sluggish and nutrient deprived. Junk food, so much a part of America culture, is just plain terrible for us. In my years of working with brain dysfunction in hospitals it would be safe to say that I saw many patients who likely had dementias due to decades of junk food, and many others where it would not be inaccurate to say: Contributing Cause of Death: Junk Food. We all know that junk food isn't good for us. But it takes willpower and sacrifice to change our diets to something healthy.

Now, let's take a moment and examine our *spiritual* diets.

As it turns out, junk food abounds in this realm as well. What we watch, what we hear, and what we read all contributes to our spiritual diet. Take the news or your political views... *who do you follow?* CNN? FOX? ABC? *This or that* reporter? Sadly, most of this is *junk food*. And even more sadly, a lot of people are addicted to this spiritual junk food, and more and more folks are almost militantly defensive of what they watch and follow.

I stopped watching news on my past favorite news channel one day in 2016 when I found that I was becoming angry every time I watched it. I also found that it was *somewhat difficult* for me to step away and turn it off. This was after I had given up all TV in 2014, but found myself back on a news station to follow the elections. One day as I was becoming angry while watching the news, I very clearly heard the Holy Spirit say to me, "*bad fruit.*" Whoa! I had never self-reflected on it, but what became clear as day by that *still small voice* was that it was absolutely true. There was nothing but bad fruit occurring as a result of watching that news. It fed my pride and ego. It made me feel justifiably judgmental. It made me angry. I don't recall it ever bringing any of the *Fruit of the Holy Spirit* (love, peace, patience, kindness, etc.). Hmmmm... Where was this *bad fruit* coming from? Not from God! Just like the physical junk food, the spiritual junk food is so enticing and so addicting. But just like the physical junk food, it completely lacks in any spiritual nutrition. A diet of it would make my spirit fat and lazy and proud; it had potential to nearly kill me (and you) spiritually.

The Word says to discern if something is from God *by the fruit*. It also says that every spirit that is of God will confess that Jesus Christ came in the flesh and is

the Son of God. So does any of that happen on the things I was watching? No. Not for me. Was it beneficial to my spirit? Did it bring me closer to God? Did it give me spiritual revelation from God? Did it help me to love God and neighbor better? Um... No... No.. No... and... NO! You see, whether the view on TV was right or wrong, good or bad, etc., doesn't matter as much as the fact that the devil knows exactly what our human weaknesses are and puts them on a "*channel*" for super easy drive-thru like access to feed our particular sin or weakness. Read that last sentence again because it is a profound truth.

If you stop to examine the words involved in television and the net/web, you can't help but at least be curious as to why the words are so tied to the occult... 'tele-vision' literally means remote vision. TV is a 'medium' and it has 'channels,' which bring to mind 'channeling.' And it has a list of 'programming.' Maybe all of this language is just a coincidence. However, I seriously wonder if things like abortion would have ever been widespread without the widespread *programming* of TV gradually revising babies to embryos, fetuses, to 'tissue.' How about how TV fed (and continues to feed) 'the sexual revolution'? It's 'food' for thought.

I certainly am not saying that there are not good things from TV or on TV. It's our choice what we watch. But I am saying that this is an area that, like my bad physical diet at the beginning of the article, needs to be brought into our conscious awareness. Here is what I mostly see if I happen to be somewhere where I can't avoid a TV set that is turned on. Having been away from it for so long, I clearly see seeds of division being sown. I see violence. I see anger. I see materialism. I see idolatry. I see deception. I see fornication and adultery and murder and 'ghosts,' and I see *the glorification of everything worldly.*

Continued on page 4

AMAZING GRACE BY DANIEL BARRON

I had my first powerful encounter with the Holy Spirit when I was seventeen. I was at the tail end of my junior year at Cathedral Prep and was fortunate enough to convince several of my friends to make a retreat with me. During this retreat, we all had powerful encounters with Christ during Eucharistic adoration. To say that the weekend changed our lives would be to put it lightly. Upon returning to our schools and our families, we carried a newness and increased fervor for life. We were on top of the world and thought that we were never coming down...but it didn't stay that way.

In the months and years that followed, I saw countless people come to know Christ. Some through the same retreat (you likely know it as TEC or DME) and some through other avenues. I watched as they raised their hands in adoration and cried tears of joy. I watched as they entered new friend groups that were centered around Jesus. I watched as they made changes to the sinful behavior in their life...and then I watched them fall away. You see...in my short twenty-seven years of life I've seen more people fall away from Christ than I care to admit. How can these people who I've seen moved so thoroughly by Christ continue to fall away from Him? How is this possible? What is causing this? I asked this in prayer and received my answer in short order. It was a simple answer. An answer that I have overlooked several times in my own life. If you do not pray...you will be led astray.

There is something inherently wrong with us as human beings that I believe has passed out of our collective consciousness as Christians. Through the fall of Adam and Eve, we have had a weakening of our human nature (CCC 418). Some of the effects of the fall remain even though through our baptism we have been freed from the stain of original sin. The Catechism of the Catholic Church refers to these leftover residual effects of the fall as "concupiscence". Concupiscence is simply our inclination towards sin...our battle with the flesh (CCC 405). In the letter to the Romans Paul talks about his own concupiscence "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do... What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death? Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, I myself in my mind am a slave to God's law, but in my sinful nature a slave to the law of sin." Romans 7:15, 24-25 NIV.

We've all felt like this before...continuously falling short of what we want to do in our walk with Christ. We are like cars that have an alignment issue. When a car hits a pothole badly enough it starts to naturally veer to the side you hit the pothole on. The human race hit a "pothole" in the garden, and now we *veer* towards sin. But the road to heaven is straight and narrow and only goes through Jesus. We can't fall into the trap of thinking we can let go of the wheel for a while and that still be fine. We won't coast through life happily by letting go of the wheel...*we'll crash*. Those of us who have had issues with alignment in our cars know it doesn't take long for this to happen, especially when the road is a very straight and narrow road! So how do we "keep our hands on the wheel?" we pray...and what does prayer do? It keeps us in communication with the best driver (God) and gives us grace.

There are two types of grace- sanctifying grace and actual grace. *Sanctifying grace* is given to us at our baptism when the effects of original sin are washed away. When this happens, we are forgiven our sins and are made the adoptive children of God. The Holy Spirit can then dwell inside of us. Unfortunately, it is possible to lose this grace by committing mortal sin. Mortal sins are the more serious sins that we commit. We can only commit a mortal sin if it is of grave (serious to our souls) matter, we know it is a grave matter, and freely choose to do it anyway. If these three conditions aren't met, then you haven't committed a mortal sin. Sins that do not carry the weight of grave matter are considered venial sins. These sins do not cut us off from the sanctifying grace of God. *Actual grace* is less of a state and more of a prompting. You can think of actual grace as the "help" we receive from God. This can take many forms. If we are in a state of mortal sin, we may receive the grace to want to repent. If we are lacking acts of charity in our life, we may receive an increased desire to begin doing them. If our prayer life is lacking, we may receive the grace to want to pray more. All we have to do to receive actual graces is to ask for them. You can be in a state of mortal sin and still receive them. Asking for these graces by praying is how we "keep our hand on the wheel". God loves us so much that he can't help but give us the graces that we need if we ask him. "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise". Psalm 51:17, NIV.

I've noticed over the years that a lot of the people who I've seen fall away from Christ were people who fell out of the habit of praying. There was very little grace flowing into their lives anymore...and just like a driver who let's go of the wheel of a car with bad alignment, they crashed. Even if you feel like you are "on top of the world" after a spiritual encounter with Christ (the way my friends and I did back in High School) you need to remember that you are still vulnerable to sin. Long after the great spiritual high you've felt has gone away (and likely especially then) you still need to be praying. If we are left to our own devices, we will fall every time. Feelings will come and go and that's ok...but it shouldn't affect our desire or fervor in following Christ. We have to keep that constant stream of grace flowing into our lives so that we persevere in following Him. Go to confession as soon as you enter a state of mortal sin and get yourself back into a state of sanctifying grace, go to Mass as often as you can (daily mass is usually only 15-30 minutes long), say the rosary as often as you can, read from the bible, say divine mercy chaplets, do holy hours in Eucharistic adoration, go to prayer groups, serve the poor, visit the imprisoned and hospitalized, the list goes on for ways in which the Holy Spirit can work in our hearts and strengthen our relationship with God.

If we "hold the wheel" by prioritizing our prayer life every day, and by staying in a state of sanctifying grace, we will be strengthened in the power and fervor of the Holy Spirit to stay on the straight and narrow path towards heaven. If we "let go of the wheel" by giving up or neglecting prayer life, it won't be long until we veer towards sin and crash. The choice is ours. - God Bless!

My grace is sufficient for you 2 Cor 12:9 NIV

THE LORD DIRECTS OUR STEPS

'Greater Things' Luncheon



**FAITH ON FIRE!
CCRC**

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Faith On Fire! Catholic Charismatic Renewal

SATURDAY APRIL 30TH, 9:30 AM – 1 PM

St Joseph Bread Of Life Community Center,
147 West 24th Street, Erie, PA

Worship by Jaci Phillips with special guests



Speaker Info: Thomas Braeger is head of International Sales at Lake Erie Systems. He runs a food recipe website: ethnicspoon.com. He has a passion for cooking that was developed with his wife of 32 years, Analida.

Tom began an unexpected journey in 2018 when his wife was diagnosed with a brain tumor. She passed away in 2020. However, God used this extraordinarily difficult and painful experience to forever change, not only Tom's path in life, but Tom himself!

Please join us as Tom shares his story of him and Analida, their battle, how God moved then, and how He continues to move in his life. The talk will conclude with a reflection by Jaci Phillips.

A delicious boxed lunch will be provided. \$10.00 for early registration by April 20th, \$12.50 April 21-26th. \$7.00 at the door, lunch not provided. Please use this

link: <https://bit.ly/steps-luncheon>

Or call TA at **814-833-9717** to register by phone. If fee is a hardship, please also call TA for a scholarship.

JUNK FOOD Continued from page 1

It's not only with TV, it's 'media' in general. i.e., what we choose to *consume*. We are literally '*consumers*.' But it is spiritual food. It has deeper effects and consequences on us than the effects of physical junk food. A term we rarely hear anymore is that we need to "guard our senses." This means that we must use discernment on what we allow to enter especially our eyes and ears. The senses are the doors to our psyche and soul, where both good and evil can enter. We are very much affected by what we allow through these doors.

Being a researcher, I have also observed that a diet of this spiritual junk food rapidly depletes the ability to engage in critical thinking or appropriately question what we are told. We *think* we are thinking for ourselves, but we are really just parroting the same views we have consumed. We *are what we eat*. It's like drive-thru spiritual fast food where someone else has already *processed* the research, thought it out, and is spoon-feeding us an opinion. It certainly is an easy option; much easier than digging into differing opinions and other sources to make better informed decisions. However, it rapidly erodes our ability to hear what the Lord has to say and to spiritually discern. After all, we are *following a channel* or an author or whoever we most agree with. When this is opposed to God it rapidly drowns out the voice of the Holy Spirit. We risk becoming spiritually obese, lazy, or worse; deceived by an enticement of the evil one. The devil doesn't really care what opinion or view we are obsessed with as long as it is an *obsession*; something that takes up our mental real estate and keeps us from the work of building our spiritual relationship and seeking God. "*But solid food is for the [spiritually] mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.*" Heb 5:14.

I have said before that we are living in a blender of confusion. We need to be careful what and where we spiritually eat. Things that used to be clear, are not so clear. What used to be clearly good or clearly sinful has *changed with the times*. It brings to mind the verse in Isaiah, "*Woe to those who call good evil and evil good.*" But when we want to know what the truth of something is, it is not a place we go to, such as a TV. It is a *person*. We go to the person who *is Truth!* It is up to us to break away from whatever our junk food might be (TV, YouTube, FaceBook, gaming, pornography, shopping, and ____ [add your own]). If you want to know truth, *know* (in a closer, more personal and intimate way) JESUS. We all need to take time to know *which voice* is the voice of the Good Shepherd and listen to the still small voice of the Holy Spirit. We get to know that voice by *listening* to it and by *consuming* the best spiritual food of all... "*Like newborn babies, long for the milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation.*" 1 Pet 2:2. The Word of God, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit is food health food for our souls. "*When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, Lord God Almighty.*" Jer 15:16. NIV.



Man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God

Matthew 4:4, NAB

I have sung and worshiped God with the song, “Days of Elijah”, especially at Holy Rosary prayer group. I have to confess that I did not know the author or background of the song until I did a search. It is an amazing story.

Robin Marks is from Belfast, Northern Ireland. War was not something he just heard about, he lived with it for 30 years. Robin was elated when peace was declared at the end of 1994 and was watching a TV show that was presenting a review of the events of the year early in 1995. As he watched, he sunk into despair, even though that year marked the beginning of a possible peaceful Ireland; it was also the year that an ugly civil war in Rwanda, which had slowly accelerated over 30 years had ended with over 1 million slaughtered.

Robin explained, **“I found myself despairing about the state of the world and asked God if he were really in control, and what days are we living in? God replied to my prayer that He was in control and the days we were living in were special times - 'Elijah' days.”**

Robin had been exposed to the Old Testament as a youngster so when God took him there, he realized the answer to his questions were with the prophets.

So, who were the prophets: When I looked for a definition, I found that prophets were individuals who were close to God, whom He used to speak to His people. Prophets were not often popular, because there were many times God used the prophets to scold or correct His people when they were being rebellious. But God also worked miracles through prophets, stirring a rebirth of faith in His people. I also learned that it is in difficult times that God is most likely to speak to us. He is always with us, but most often, difficult times is when *we turn to Him*.

Elijah was in a position where he had to challenge a Jewish King. Ahab had turned to his wife’s religion. Queen Jezebel practiced the ancient Canaanite religion and worshipped at the altar of the god Baal, who was the god of fertility and weather. In this part of the story, the country had experienced three years of drought resulting in famine. Ahab called the people together to pray to Baal for rain. But God sent His prophet Elijah to confront Ahab. Ahab did not want to be told he was wrong. So, for all to see, Elijah famously challenged Ahab and the prophets of Baal. Elijah and the prophets of Baal each built a huge altar to sacrifice a bull but were not allowed to light it on fire. The challenge was to pray for their god to light the fire. The prophets of Baal prayed and prayed but no fire. On the top of Mount Carmel, Elijah prayed, and God not only sent a cloud full of rain to drench the pyre, but He also then set it on fire. Many were converted and the drought ended. Elijah did not earn favor with King Ahab and the struggle between them continued. Elijah stayed strong in his faith through persecution and worked many miracles and countless people came back to Jehovah, the living God of Israel.

Ezekiel was a prophet during the time when the Jewish kingdom was eliminated. The Jewish people had no land and were scattered among many nations. This was the result of them turning away from God with sinful ways. In Ezekiel

36, 37 and 38 we can read what happened to them and then the amazing prophecy that God spoke through Ezekiel who saw a vision of a field of dry bones being given flesh and becoming alive again. The dry bones represented the people of Israel, whose faith was dead. He told them that if they would repent and return to God, they would be given back their land, and would be called back from all over the earth to prosper and rebuild their land.

The reference to David is that he ultimately was responsible for beginning the rebuilding of God’s temple. He began this work, but it was completed by his son Solomon.

So, as Robin remembered the prophets and what the world was like during their times, and what God spoke to them, the worship song came together as he pondered:

In the days of Elijah, times were very bad. A drought and people (even the king) were worshiping false Gods. When Elijah spoke the truth, king Ahab was furious, yet Elijah did not back down. God spoke to the people: repent, return to me, and I will end the famine.

In the days of Ezekiel, the Jewish kingdom had been annihilated and the people scattered- some in captivity. They had lost their land, their faith and their hope. Ezekiel spoke God’s message to them. Return to God, and He will return to you all you have lost, your faith, your land, and reunite your people.

The last prophet in the song is David. David was used by God in many ways, but the most significant was the preservation of the Ark of the Covenant, and the beginning of the rebuilding of the temple of God.

Are we in the Days of Elijah? It certainly looks that way. People are in rebellion against God and people and nations are suffering the consequences of sin.

But Robin’s song is not a story of doom. When we read history, even when rebellious, God does not abandon us. He sends prophets to remind us to repent and return to Him. Robin’s song is a song of hope- God will not forget His people. We are being given the opportunity to bring God’s truth to others, as Elijah did; and pray them back to spiritual life just like Ezekiel saw the dry bones coming back to life; and rebuild God’s church, as David did. PRAISE GOD!!!!

“And though these are the days of great trial; of famine and great trial and sword; still, we are the voice in the desert crying; prepare ye the way of the Lord!!!” Robin Marks; Days of Elijah.

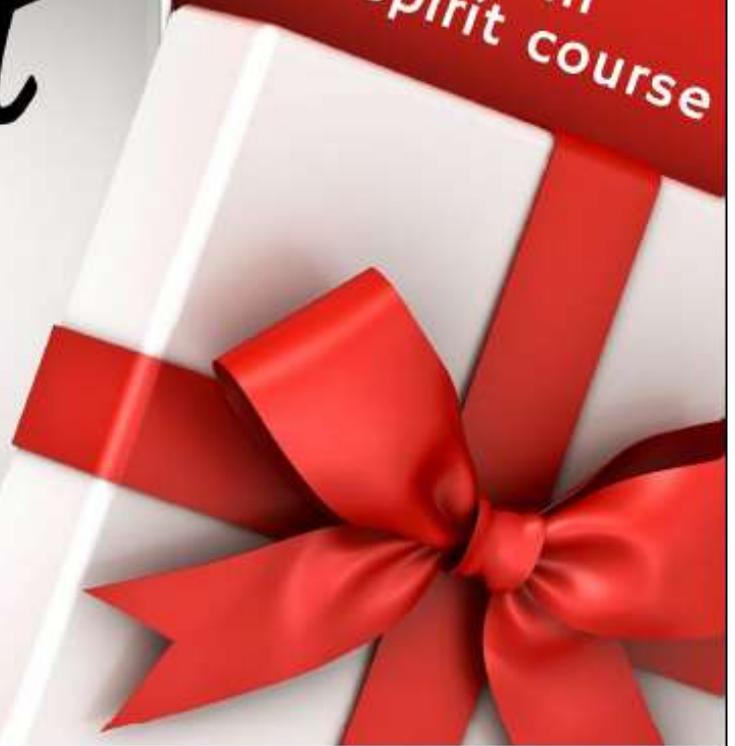


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upcoming events

FIRST SATURDAYS

Mass in honor of Our Lady
9:00 AM at St. Gregory's, Northeast, PA
Sacred Music beginning at 8:50 AM
Soloist: Jacqueline Phillips
Organist: Corey Spacht
Celebrant: Rev. Jerry Priscaro

The Lord Directs Our Steps *Greater Things Luncheon*

St. Joseph/Bread of Life Community Center
Saturday April 30- 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM
See flier on page 3

FIRST MONDAYS

Adoration Holy Hour
Contemporary Worship by Harmony's House
6:30pm—St Agatha's 353 Pine, Meadville

Spirit Filled - Healing Mass

Sponsored by Son of God Prayer Group
Holy Rosary Church
2701 East Ave, Erie
Tuesday's Worship 6:15 PM Mass 6:30 PM
2022—May 10th, August 9th, October 11th

Life In The Spirit

St. Michael's, Emlenton, PA
Friday and Saturday, May 20 - 21, 2022

Fan Into The Flame Seminar

St. Joseph/Bread of Life Community Center
Friday & Saturday - June 17 - 18, 2022

Alicia Hartle

Greater Things Luncheon
St. Joseph/Bread of Life Community Center
Saturday - 9:30 AM - 1:00 PM
August 20, 2022

Adoration Worship Concert

St. George Church
Thursday, September 15, 2022
7:00 PM - 9:00 PM

Jesus, Son of God, in whom the fullness of the Divinity dwells, You call all the baptized to "put out into the deep," taking the path that leads to holiness. Waken in the hearts of young people the desire to be witnesses in the world of today to the power of your love. Fill them with your Spirit of fortitude and prudence, so that they may be able to discover the full truth about themselves and their own vocation. Our Savior, sent by the Father to reveal His merciful love, give to your Church the gift of young people who are ready to put out into the deep, to be the sign among their brothers of Your presence which renews and saves. Holy Virgin, Mother of the Redeemer, sure guide on the way towards God and towards neighbor, You who pondered his word in the depth of your heart, sustain with your motherly intercession our families and our ecclesial communities, so that they may help adolescents and young people to answer generously the call of the Lord. Amen.

—John Paul II—

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Contributions can be made by check, text, Tithe.ly app, and on the website.

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Reflections

on 'The Greater Things'

APRIL 2022

THE LORD DIRECTS OUR STEPS

'Greater Things' Luncheon

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SATURDAY APRIL 30TH, 9:30 AM - 1 PM

St. Joseph Bread Of Life Community Center,
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The office is generally open limited hours.
Please call before coming.

The purpose of this newsletter is to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, and to provide teaching, news, and calendar of events, which help to foster Catholic Charismatic Renewal throughout the Diocese of Erie.

This newsletter may be copied to put in churches or shared with others.

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